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# PROGRAM

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# A Primer for Commanders
# and Public Affairs Officers

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A PRIMER FOR COMMANDERS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS

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A primary function of Air Force commanders is to establish a communication system within their organizations. Communication ensures mission accomplishment by keeping people informed about goals, methods, and their personal roles. This handbook is primarily designed to help wing commanders develop a base internal communication system, including ideas for effective use of the base newspaper, Commander's Call, Action Line and supervisors. Internal communication is critical to civilian corporations, too. The handbook also discusses how corporation programs can be modified to expand the Air Force communication channels. A descriptive communication model is provided along with recommendations for working with the Public Affairs Office to implement a communication program.

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# PREFACE

The primary function of a commander is to communicate, by deed or by word. Nothing is more basic. Nothing is more important because everything a commander does--motivate, direct, coordinate, organize--depends upon the communication process. According to Chester I. Barnard, a pioneer writer in the fields of leadership and management, "The first executive function is to develop and maintain a system of communication." The purpose of this handbook is to help Air Force commanders (primarily, wing commanders) carry out this first executive function. A second audience is the public affairs officer (PAO), a member of the commander's immediate staff whose job is to assist the commander in conducting an "internal information (communication) program."

The importance of internal communication has received high-level command attention in the Air Force. The popular synopsis of the Air Force mission is "to fly and to fight." This mission depends upon communication, according to Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Charles A. Gabriel,

> Combat readiness is as much a matter of mind as of weapons and logistics. Self-confidence in our capabilities, willingness to fight when called upon, commitment to America's national ideals are important mental factors in the readiness equation. Air Force leaders engender

> self-confidence and inspire people through
> training and education programs and through
> communicating. Communication is particularly
> important, because it personalizes the link
> between commanders and their people. Through
> word and action, leaders must communicate
> effectively at all levels in order to develop
> the unit cohesion that leads to top perfor-
> mance. In addition, communication between a
> commander and his people must flow in two
> directions and must take place regularly--
> daily, weekly, and monthly.

Communication is also critical to the quality of life of the

Air Force members supporting the mission. According to the

Honorable Vern Orr, Secretary of the Air Force,

> One of the most important functions we all
> share is to keep our people informed about
> matters affecting their lives. When talking
> to Air Force people at various bases, I find
> that many of them have questions about enti-
> tlements and other subjects. There is a con-
> cern and sometimes misunderstanding about the
> future of the military retirement plan and
> about quality of life matters such as allow-
> ances for housing, reimbursement for travel
> and other matters of compensation....

Secretary Orr's comment does more than just reaffirm the

impact and importance of communication. Commanders should,

but may not always, continually address quality-of-life issues

to answer the questions and clear up the misunderstandings

people have. The results of three years of surveys adminis-

tered by teams from the Air Force Leadership and Management

Development Center (LMDC), Maxwell AFB, Ala., also indicate
intra-organizational communication may not always be effective.
The LMDC "Organizational Assessment Package" contains a sec-
tion on "Organizational Communications Climate" which is
rated, like other sections, on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 is the
negative end of the scale, 4 the neutral point, and 7 the
positive end). The overall evaluation average of this commun-
ication section for the past three years is 4.48. As stated
by one LMDC evaluator, only .48 to the positive side is "less
than a glowing endorsement" for the Air Force communication
climate. Civilian corporations often don't fare well either
when their internal communication programs are scrutinized.
There is a concern, either voiced by individual leaders and
commanders or reflected in surveys such as those conducted by
LMDC, that the need for effective communication is not always
consistently acted upon. Hopefully, this handbook will help
commanders turn their desire to communicate into concrete
plans and programs.

Other research projects by Air Command and Staff College
and Air War College course officers have dealt with communi-
cation. They have focused on specific internal information

programs, such as the Action Line or Commander's Call, but
none have dealt with the total Internal Information Program.
A general handbook for PAOs was published in 1981, but it
doesn't deal in detail with any aspect of the public affairs
function. These studies are valuable and, in some cases,
contributed to this work. This handbook will try to bring
the bits and pieces together for commanders and serve as an
easily digestible reference. For the commander's PAO, this
handbook may also serve as a general guide and tickler for
new ideas on conducting an Internal Information Program.

It should be noted now that the term "internal informa-
tion program" will not be used in the remainder of this hand-
book. Internal information is used in Air Force public
affairs regulations. The term "information" seems static,
however, and may imply that only facts and data are conveyed.
This is not totally accurate. Important perceptions about
credibility, openness and personal concern for others also
flow through a communication program. Therefore, the term
"internal communication program" will be used. This reflects

the author's opinion, hopefully supported by the research,
that the process of communication is the important idea to be
studied.

The handbook is organized into five chapters. Chapter
One will discuss the value and uses of an internal communica-
tion program. Chapter Two will lay a common foundation for
understanding by identifying a general model of communication
and specific qualities necessary for an internal, organiza-
tional communication model to work. The various formal com-
munication channels provided for in Air Force regulations will
be discussed in Chapter Three, with an emphasis on the philos-
ophy, style, and content, rather than detailed mechanics. In
Chapter Four, the handbook will present some communication
techniques and programs used by civilian corporations to con-
duct their internal communication programs. It is the premise
of this handbook that certain principles of communication work
basically the same whether in a civilian or military organi-
zation. Therefore, all types of organizations can benefit
by considering programs proven successful for other groups.
Finally, Chapter Five will suggest ways the commander can

approach the overall task of developing a communication pro-

gram. The chapter will also suggest this handbook will never

really be complete. New ideas and techniques can always be

developed as technology and ingenuity expand. More than any-

thing, the purpose and goal is to emphasize the importance of

internal communication.

This document will be submitted to the Air Force Service

Information and News Center, Kelly AFB, Tex., for review and

possible publication and distribution to public affairs

offices and wing commanders throughout the Air Force. The

author wishes to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of

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Major Thomas J. Boyd has spent most of his Air Force career as a public affairs officer. His assignments have included public affairs staff officer positions in the Military Airlift Command and Air Force ROTC headquarters. He also served as deputy chief of the public affairs office for the 82d Flying Training Wing, chief of the 375th Aeromedical Airlift Wing public affairs office, and chief of media relations for the U.S. Air Force Academy. Prior to entering Air Command and Staff College, he was an assistant professor of aerospace studies at Air Force ROTC Det. 535, Syracuse University, and also one of 39 Air Force ROTC admissions counselors from across the country. Major Boyd was an Air Force ROTC distinguished military graduate and received a B.S. degree in journalism in 1971 from West Virginia University. In 1981, he earned an M.A. degree in public administration from Auburn University at Montgomery. Major Boyd has also completed the Defense Information School at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, the Short Course in Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma, and Squadron Officer School. He is a member of Kappa Tau Alpha, national journalism honor society, and Pi Sigma Alpha, national political science honor society.

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Chapter One

## THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATION

"Information is the most essential link between wise
leadership and purposeful action," was how former Air Force
Chief of Staff Gen. Thomas D. White summarized the value of
communication. Internal communication programs are the chan-
nels through which this important information flows. A unit's
mission effectiveness depends upon whether information flows
freely, swiftly, and accurately through communication channels
or if it is bottled up and distorted. Communication holds an
organization together; it contributes to organizational cohe-
sion, which is recognized, for example, in the Basic Aerospace
Doctrine of the United States Air Force, under Section 2-6,
the Principles of War:

> Cohesion is the principle of establishing and
> maintaining the warfighting spirit and capa-
> bility of a force to win. Cohesion is the
> cement that holds a unit together through the
> trials of combat and is critical to the
> fighting effectiveness of a force...Commanders
> build cohesion through effective leadership and
> by generating a sense of common identity and
> shared purpose. Leaders maintain cohesion by
> communicating objectives clearly, demonstrating
> genuine concern for the morale and welfare of
> their people, and employing men and machines
> according to the dictates of sound military
> doctrine. Cohesion in a force is produced over
> time through effective leadership at all levels
> of command. (Author's emphasis added.)

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The ultimate value of an internal communication program is not in the "high gloss quality" of its products or the smoothness with which the programs function, but in how it affects what people believe in and how they act. As the basic aerospace doctrine implies, communication's value is found in getting people to work together and having them understand what they must do and why it is important they do it.

The view that a better informed worker is a better overall employee is widely held in civilian corporations and organizations. As was stated in the Preface, organizations with unrelated missions and goals, such as civilian versus military, use the same basic principles of communication and should benefit from any interchange of ideas. According to Atlantic Richfield Company's manager of employee communications, David Orman, "We feel that employees who are better informed about the company, their jobs and their fellow employees are going to be better workers, better spokespersons for the company and better able to contribute to its profitability."

A chief executive officer (CEO) of a corporation, like an Air Force wing commander, is ultimately responsible for keeping the company's employees better informed. Roger D'Aprix, a writer in the corporate communication field, asserts, "The responsibility for communication leadership--and indeed the ownership of the communication process and problem--rests with senior management." The commander or CEO must take a

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direct role in the communication process and actively fight what seems to be an inherent bureaucratic tendency to suppress information in an almost "prove to me that you need to know this" fashion. According to D'Aprix,

> Intelligent institutional leaders, rather than searching for the best ways to protect information and to withhold it from people lower down in the organization, must search for information control systems that give people the information they need to do their work as well as to reduce the anxiety they feel about their role in the organization.

The importance and impact of internal communication programs may be apparent, but, unfortunately, successful or effective implementation is not always the case. One long-term survey of about 250,000 employees from approximately 200 organizations found that "no more than four in 10 employees at any organizational level, including managers, feel their companies do a good job of letting them know what is going on in the company." This conclusion corresponds with the LMDC survey of 144,000 Air Force members since 1981 (cited in the Preface), showing only a slightly positive rating of organizational communication. A commander is not only responsible for establishing and preserving a communication network, but for setting the tone and atmosphere in which it will function. How does a commander take the recognized value of an internal communication program and translate it into better informed, better working people?

One way is to define some specific communication respon-
sibilities and goals. W. Charles Redding, in The Corporate
Manager's Guide to Better Communication, identifies several
universal communication responsibilities:

(1) "To articulate goals and to encourage understanding
of these goals." A commander must not only talk about the
wing's primary mission, but relate how the individual tasks
of squadrons and supporting units contribute to that mission.
How the wing contributes to the larger mission of, for example,
a numbered Air Force and up the organizational chain to the
Air Force's overall national defense role is also something
that should be brought into focus for members of the wing.
Military and Air Force civilian members alike will want answers
to questions, such as: Why is my job important to this mission?
Why is this unit's mission valuable to the Air Force and to
the future of this country? The individual worker will also
want to pass on the answers to these questions to family and
friends. One of the toughest tasks when articulating goals
is relating specific job requirements to the larger mission.
It is important, though, to discuss both long-range and short-
range goals and show how work goals, and the quality of indi-
vidual efforts, contribute to mission success.

(2) "To disseminate (or supervise the dissemination of)
information required for the daily operations of the company.
This includes information about the relationship between per-
formance and rewards, such as pay and promotions; how rewards

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and penalties are determined; problems facing the company; and long-range plans." For example, how does the Stripes for Exceptional Performers program work so an airman can get that next stripe early? Or, how can the wing get ready for the next Operational Readiness Inspection—and what is the purpose of an ORI? This second function relates directly to the first responsibility of articulating organizational goals. A commander can talk about the goals of the wing or the Air Force in general and then discuss just what steps, challenges or sacrifices will be necessary to reach those goals. Will the budget be tighter; will work schedules change; will the equipment be different? All types of questions can surface in the daily operation. Unless the commander's communication system can provide the answers, people "will be frustrated in their information requirements" and turn to alternate sources, such as the "rumor mill" or the "grapevine."

(3) "To resolve destructive conflict, to negotiate, to conciliate." This handbook will only deal in the area of public conflict and not with cases normally handled through confidential channels, such as the Inspector General system. Where can a commander deal with public complaints? Base newspaper "Action Line" columns and Commander's Call are just two examples. A commander must not only address the specific question and the individual, but must make the answer understandable and convincing to a wider, concerned audience. The goal is not to stifle conflict, but to resolve it, in part,

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by giving it an open hearing. Encouraging feedback (which will be defined in the next chapter), although always important in communication, is critically important in this function.

(4) "To represent oneself, one's unit, or one's company in situations requiring explanation and advocacy." Relating this responsibility only to an internal communication program, a commander may need to explain performance standards by which people and mission accomplishment will be judged. What will be the principles and rules of daily operation and why are they important to follow? The commander will often need to serve as the spokesperson for higher headquarters decisions, policies, or positions. As with resolving conflict, the commander will often explain or advocate a position to an individual, but really address the entire unit.

(5) "To help make the work place a more satisfying and fulfilling--rather than alienating--experience for everyone in the organization...The goal here is not so much to make workers 'happy' as to make them feel part of the organization --not just 'neglected cogs in an impersonal machine'." A few years ago, the concept of belonging to an "Air Force family" was publicized. (For many people the idea and feeling wasn't new, but formalizing the term "family" was.) That idea, or the analogy of belonging to a team, won't work without communication. Quality of life issues and psychological rewards are sometimes just as important as a raise in pay. A corporate

communication director for Pennsylvania Power and Light
Company, Thomas Ruddell, asserts what many commanders and CEOs
already know (without ever studying a heirarchy of needs),
"Pay, benefits and job security are important motivators, but
they're not as important as feeling appreciated and part of
the team...and that takes communication."

There are other communication responsibilities for a
commander, but they are mainly in the external or public area.
The responsibilities discussed center on internal communica-
tion, which may be the most important of all communication
concerns for the commander and his public affairs staff.  As
stated in a Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Public
Affairs bulletin,

> ...communicating with our people is probably
> the most important aspect of our public affairs
> charter...without first letting our people know
> what's happening in our Air Force, the chances
> for success in the other areas are minimal.
> Internal Information is the very foundation of
> all our public affairs efforts.  If our "family"
> does not feel important, have a positive atti-
> tude, present a sharp image--then we have failed.

This first chapter has discussed the value and importance
of communication to an organization's mission accomplishment.
Air Force and civilian corporate executives recognize that
an internal communication program can establish the founda-
tion for any organization.  Motivation and cohesion throughout
a unit result from commanders "generating a sense of common
identity" and specifying clear objectives through an effective
internal communication system.  The effectiveness of an

internal communication prog..m depends upon a commander's

direct and active participation. Several specific communica-

tion responsibilities were proposed: (1) articulating and

encouraging understanding of organizational goals, (2) distem-

inating information required for daily operation, (3) resolving

destructive conflict, (4) advocating and explaining personal

or corporate standards and policies, and (5) making the organ-

ization a more satisfying place to work. This chapter also

mentioned that leaders are not always successful in estab-

lishing internal communication programs. Along with defining

communication goals and responsibilities, a commander might

also want to understand a basic model of how researchers

believe communication "works." Also, there are certain

important "qualities" in the communication process. Under-

standing a communication model and these qualities could help

establish both the mechanics and tone of a system responsive

to the communication goals of a commander and the needs of

subordinates. A communication model and certain qualities of

the process will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

## A COMMUNICATION MODEL

Although communication is the most common social process,
most scholars agree it is far from the best understood. As
one scholar of communication theory wrote, "Perhaps communi-
cation is too much a part of us to even study. It is so
ubiquitous and pervasive that it seems like the air. You
know it is there, but it is so available and so common that
it does not seem terribly important to worry much about it."
Communication must be studied and worried about, the scholar
added, because it is the key to unraveling so many of the
world's problems and mysteries. On a more practical level,
a commander worries about communication because it can make
the critical difference between mission accomplishment or
failure. This chapter will tackle the process of communica-
tion through the description of a basic model. Understanding
this model won't guarantee success in practice, but it is a
good starting point. After discussing this model, the chapter
will deal with specific qualities of the sender (i.e., the
commander), the channels used, and the perceptions of the
receiver(s). How do these qualities impact the process? Why
are they so important?

One formal definition of communication is "the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal) to modify the behavior of other individuals (the audience)." This definition may be too restrictive since many different researchers have concluded that "stimuli," aside from the obvious written kind, are often non-verbal. Everything from body language to atmosphere and setting "communicates" a message. A simpler definition is "the process of transferring information and understanding to another person." By breaking down these definitions into their common parts, the communication model can be formed.

First, the communicator is the orginator or initiator of the process. A person starts a conversation for a reason which is generally, no matter what the subject, "to influence other individuals in a way favorable to the communicators." It is an attempt to change the way another person thinks or behaves. Even social conversation--"small talk"--is started unconsciously to influence another person's consideration, affection, or companionship.

The communicator's first function in the process is to encode information into symbols that are hopefully common and understandable to the intended receiver. Symbols can be written or spoken words, or gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal indications of meaning. Body language may often mean more than spoken words--an accompanying icy stare may take all the "warmth" out of a verbal compliment.

> ...nonverbal messages are usually more reli-
> able than verbal messages. Because it is so
> easy to lie with words, we know that words
> alone are not enough to establish the authen-
> ticity of a message. It is much more diffi-
> cult to "lie" nonverbally...Nonverbal commun-
> ications are therefore considered to be more
> believable than words. If a verbal message
> conflicts with the nonverbal expression, we
> will tend to believe the nonverbal message.
> We rely primarily on the nonverbal clues to
> get our impressions of how honest other people
> are in their interpersonal relationships,
> rather than on what they tell us about them-
> selves....

It is important for the communicator not to "mix up" the

symbols or use uncommon ones. The communication process

involves transferring a set of symbols representing the com-

municator's ideas, not the ideas themselves. Therefore,

unless the communicator chooses symbols understandable to the

receiver, the information transfer will likely be distorted.

"The set of symbols when placed in some channel becomes

a message. Channels are the carriers of the message." Chan-

nels are the physical means used to carry the message symbols

from the communicator (sender) to the receiver. The following

chapters will deal with specific channels--the internal com-

munication programs and products. Mass communication takes

place when a channel reaches a large number of people at the

same time (a meeting) or over an extended period of time (a

newspaper). It is very important to realize, however, this

doesn't really change the communicative act or its basic qual-

ities. According to communication researcher Melvin DeFleur,

It is also true that mass communication is
likely to involve large numbers of people in
addition to complex mechanical or electronic
elaborations of the channels. However, this
is a difference of quantity rather than of
principle. The relationship between a given
mass communicator and a given member of his
audience still takes place with significant
symbols; the nature of meaning remains the
same; and the communicative act still occurs
through the various components....

In simple terms, a communicator must realize a speech to a

large group of people, for example, will involve both group

dynamics and reactions found in one-on-one communication.

As soon as a receiver perceives the message symbols,

verbal and/or nonverbal, decoding begins. This takes the

symbols sent and turns them into symbols and ideas under-

standable to the receiver. What was meant in the message is

not always what is received, for many different reasons. For

example, the sender's set of symbols may be unknown to the

receiver or the receiver may attach a different meaning to

the same symbols because of a different frame of reference or

semantics--words meaning different things to different people.

The feedback channel, which will be discussed next, helps

clarify any confusion over the meaning of symbols. A way of

making a message clear is through redundancy. "In the course

of a normal conversation many points are made more than once.

In addition, the language is itself redundant...The effect of

this redundancy is usually to make the message more clear."

Redundancy is effective only to a point, however, and then

it becomes counterproductive. A final point about decoding--

the process is influenced by the recei... r opinion of the sender. How reliable has the sender been in the past? Are there any ulterior motives involved in sending this message? Decoding, like encoding, is not just simply choosing words.

The process isn't completed with the decoding and "translating" done by the receiver. The transfer of meaning needs a feedback channel to complete the process. It can be regarded, in one way, as a role reversal, where the receiver reacts to the message received and becomes the sender. Feedback is essential to any effective communication, and is probably always given, whether asked for or not. Feedback "may not always be easily recognized. It is through feedback that communicators find out how effective their communication has been. Feedback gives the communicator the potential for modification of future communication efforts to make them more effective." Without feedback, the sender operates in a vacuum of doubt--did the person get my message and understand what I want? If the reason for communication is to bring about a desired change, then feedback is the direct way of finding out if that change is occurring or will occur later.

To complicate this entire process further, it occurs in an atmosphere of "noise"--any distraction that "interferes with the effectiveness of communication." There are obvious "noises," such as background sounds in a room or other people interrupting a conversation. Not so easily noticed distractions

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can be, for example, daydreaming by the sender or receiver. Repetition without real meaning or purpose behind the words can also be a form of noise.

> Anything that is repeated often without effect
> is noise. It just doesn't communicate. People
> will see and hear the words but they don't add
> meaning to them. Thus, many things a super-
> visor says are ignored, actually never heard,
> because they sound so much like what he has
> said many times before. Such comments as "work
> efficiently", "This operation is vitally impor-
> tant", "Save resources", and "The boss is
> counting on us" tend to lose their impact after
> several repetitions....

If a communicator has some control over the environment in which any communication is to take place, an important step is to eliminate, or reduce as much as possible, the "noise" level. A commander, for example, might say "Hold all my calls" or conduct a Commander's Call some other time besides a late Friday afternoon when people are anxious to get home and start their weekend. There will always be noise. All a communicator can hope to do is turn down the volume.

Considering these factors--encoding, transmitting, decoding, and noise--how can a commander determine if the entire process works? There is no single measure except, possibly, if the receiver's thinking or behavior changes. As previously stated, that is the goal and purpose of commun- ication. Each part of the model, however, should be considered in determining the process's effectiveness. Saul Gellerman,

a management analyst, said communication is effective when a message is

> received by its intended audience,
> interpreted in essentially the same way by
>      the recipients as by the senders,
> remembered over reasonably extended periods
>      of time, and
> used when appropriate occasions arise.

For example, posting notices on bulletin boards does not ensure workers will receive the message (receiving). Using words and ideas common to the audience assists the decoding and interpretation process (interpreting). Repeating a message through several different channels will help the audience remember the message (remembering). With this description of "effectiveness," each part of the communication model becomes critical to the entire process.

In looking at an organization's communication program, a commander could first consider the communication model and how it highlights possible pitfalls. For instance, does the commander speak and write in terms and references familiar to airmen who may be a generation or more younger? Adopting a different speech pattern isn't necessary, but finding common terms understandable to senior and junior airmen and officers alike will increase the chances for decoding the message as the sender would like. A commander should also be aware of noise factors involved in different communication channels. Printing the same kind of safety stories, with the same slogans, each week in the base newspaper may create redundancy

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noise rather than drive the message home. An important part of the communication model needed in any organization's program is the feedback loop. If possible, programs should have automatic feedback systems included and other feedback channels should be opened to increase opportunities for people to respond to what they receive. After the challenges of the communication model, the commander can next consider the qualities of communication that make it valuable to the organization's members.

These qualities--credibility, openness, perceptions, and personalness--can individually or together impact the effectiveness of a communication program in any organization.

<div align="center">CREDIBILITY</div>

Undoubtedly, the single most undesirable trait for any employee is dishonesty. The same applies to communication. Credibility is a quality embodying trustworthiness (honesty), along with knowledge (expertise), and the communicator's personal intentions. If a communicator wants to convince someone else to do something (the aim of communication is manipulation), then credibility is the key.

> ...research evidence indicates that...the very
> same presentation tends to be judged more favor-
> ably when made by a communicator of high credi-
> bility than by one of low credibility. Further-
> more,...the immediate acceptance of the recom-
> mended opinion was greater when presented by a
> highly credible communicator.

Despite being essential and influential, credibility is not always present or perceived in the communication model. In a 1982 survey of 26 companies, half of the 32,000 employees who responded said they "had serious doubts about the candor, accuracy, and fairness of corporate publications." On a smaller scale, a researcher asked the president and six vice presidents of a company to predict how most supervisors and managers in several divisions would respond to the question "How do you feel this statement applies in this company: 'You can always trust management's word?'." The results were:

> Six of the seven (president/vice presidents) predicted that the supervisors and managers would agree "overwhelmingly" that management's word could be trusted virtually 100 percent of the time. What did the supervisors and managers (representing three hierarchial levels) tell the researcher? Roughly half the sample, when interviewed, reported that they would trust management's word only half the time or less....

The moral of this example is managers and leaders may seriously "overestimate their credibility ratings with subordinates and employees." Commanders and CEOs must realize their subordinates don't necessarily equate authority with credibility. In some cases, institutions or organizations take on a credibility rating. A wing staff officer, representing the commander, may "stretch the truth" and therefore tarnish the credibility of the command section, and ultimately, the commander. An airman, misinformed by one worker in the Consolidated Base Personnel Office, may continue to

doubt anything the personnel office announces. Worst of all, once credibility is compromised, it is very tough, and takes a long time, to rebuild.

The importance of credibility and compliance with its high standards must be emphasized from the commander's perspective. When assessing the command's credibility rating, a commander could ask a few questions suggested by Redding.

(1)  On how many occasions in the past have deeds failed to follow words? How many rosy --or alarming--predictions have turned out to be false? (Were the predictions stated dogmatically, or were they carefully hedged?)

(2)  How often has management played games with employees--for example, by concealing the true motives behind certain decisions (or even by propagating downright falsehoods)?

(3)  To what extent do company publications restrict themselves to acting as a cheering section? Do they merit Townsend's epithet "warm maple syrup" by featuring nothing but picnics, anniversaries, and bowling scores?

(4)  To what extent do management utterances consist of "inspirational" sermons on such themes as "pulling in our belts", "loyalty to the team", and the "work ethic"?

(5)  How often is it easy for people to see contradictions between official pronouncements (policies, rules, regulations) on the one hand and everyday practices on the other? Why?

(6)  Perhaps most important of all, the real litmus test: How is bad news handled? (Stonewalled? Distorted? Whitewashed?)

Credibility throughout all levels of a command's communication program is essential or the people--the receivers--will turn up the "noise" volume until nothing comes through--true or not.

## OPENNESS

This quality in a communication program can be effectively and dramatically demonstrated by the commander's accessibility. One institutionalized program is the "open-door policy." It takes two people to make it work: a subordinate, who really believes that he or she will be welcomed by the commander, and the commander, who really believes the program is a worthwhile way to spend precious time. One way to advertise an open-door policy is to do so in person. (Specific suggestions on how a commander and the unit's members can get together for face-to-face communication will be suggested in Chapters Three and Four.) The commander must personally encourage others to constructively take advantage of an open-door policy, and then make such visits worthwhile by devoting full attention to a visitor. The commander could, for example, set aside a specific time each day or week "for the sole purpose of listening to problems or suggestions" and "keep disruptive interruptions to a minimum." The commander should issue instructions to hold all calls (except for emergencies, of course) and should put all other business aside during the visit.

Critical to an open-door policy is dealing with the problems that surface during an interview. A commander needs to "create an atmosphere in which it is made unmistakably clear that people are rewarded, not penalized, for speaking out or for being the bearers of bad news." The majority of open-door visitors will bring in their problems, complaints, or sad tales, rather than praise. These items may be individual situations, or they may reflect significant, never-before-surfaced problems. They may be a valuable "heads-up" for problems brewing. The commander must participate in an open-door policy believing it is time well spent toward better operation and improved morale and performance.

Openness in a communication program should be demonstrated in more ways than just an open-door policy. Internal publications need to reflect this quality, too. Merck & Co., Inc., the largest prescription drug maker in the United States, was highlighted in the book <u>The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America</u>. One point made in its favor was the policy followed by its company newspapers and magazines. "They show an openness in discussion of the company's business, they portray employees in human terms, and they are produced with the kind of care that makes you think, 'Here's a company that values people enough to address them in a straightforward, intelligent manner. There's no phoniness or condescension.'" Openness means not only accessibililty but credibility. The two qualities are strongly tied together.

## PERCEPTIONS

It is often not what something "is" that is important, but what people "perceive" it to be. A commander's credibility and openness, and those qualities in the the internal communication program, are instrumental in creating perceptions held by people in the unit. Brig. Gen. Richard F. Abel, director of Air Force Public Affairs, asserts, "Until the leader's concern is communicated, it can have little, if any, effect on the organization." Perceptions of concern, credibility, and openness can be created intentionally or unintentionally. Redding observed that,

> ...convincing evidence can be found to support
> the conclusion that many managers are perceived
> by employees as treating them as if they were
> jackasses, children, or morons. Don't miss
> that key word perceived. A manager may, inside,
> be a deeply caring and sensitive person. But
> this fact becomes tragically irrelevant if
> others perceive him as unfeeling, callous,
> patronizing--that is, insensitive. Hence, the
> pivotal role of communication. If managers
> are perceived as insensitive, a close scrutiny
> of their messages--especially their uninten-
> tional messages--should lead to discovery of
> the factors causing such perceptions....

Misperceptions can also result from conflicting messages presented by different communication media. For instance, a commander may condemn a high vehicle and personnel accident rate at each staff meeting, Commander's Call, and through the base newspaper. But, if the commander is so quoted by local news media as being proud of the wing's safety program, then a serious disconnect of ideas happens. The commander or

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CEO must realize people get messages from many different sources. If the messages all seem to agree, the perception is clear. If the messages contradict, misperceptions occur and credibility suffers.

A basic way of correcting misperceptions is by dealing with them openly and honestly whenever and wherever they occur. This can be done through the intelligent use of internal communication channels. For example, employees may not believe they are respected by company leaders. One employee commented in a company's communication survey, "We were officially informed (of the merger) <u>two days later via a press release</u>. Employees should have the right to know what's happening prior to public release." Other employees voiced similar feelings about the company, "Our people are the last to know about what's going on inside the Company." "There's an air of secrecy." If the employees did, in fact, find out from the news media plans concerning their future, rather than from their company leaders, then it would be hard not to develop a strong perception of "corporate secrecy." Instead, the company should have used its internal communication channels to fully inform its employees, and then worry about the public news media. A fully informed employee is often the best company spokesperson to news media or friends outside the company. The perception that "my company cares that I know what's going on" does much to strengthen employee self-respect and loyalty to the company.

## PERSONALNESS

There is no more effective communication channel than face-to-face conversation. Unfortunately, the commander of a wing with thousands of military and civilian personnel, and their associated dependents, cannot possibly use this channel for everyone and every message. That doesn't mean, however, the concept, sensitivity, and "feeling" of a face-to-face meeting can't be transmitted somewhat through other less-personal channels. When writing an editorial column for the base newspaper, or standing up in front of a Commander's Call audience, the commander can rely on terms such as "us" and "you and me," rather than "this command" or "this squadron." This is not advocating a familiarity which would degrade discipline. Instead, it is writing or speaking to individuals in the group rather than addressing the mass.

A positive result of personalizing communication channels and messages is developing "a genuine dialogue between employees and management." An individual is more likely to respond to what is perceived as a personal message from the commander with important feedback (like action or suggestions for doing something better). Feedback provides the sender an indication of how and if the message was received. Without it, the communication act is incomplete. With feedback, one-way communication channels, such as the base newspaper, become two-way channels through an "Action Line" and other columns which solicit opinions. Question-and-answer sessions are an

important part of a Commander's Call, too. The need for per-
sonalness means a commander cannot rely solely on mechanical
communication channels, no matter how well, for example, a base
newspaper is put together. The quality requires a commander's
direct involvement in as many different areas as possible.

The objective of this chapter has been to identify a
communication model and discuss several particular qualities
which could be attached to the model. These qualities, as
related to a commander's position and participation, can make
or break the success of the model.

The model describes a continuous flow process when two
or more people want to exchange ideas and influence each
other. A sender uses a set of symbols to encode a message.
This message is transmitted via a channel, using one or more
of the senses (primarily sight and/or sound). A receiver uses
another set of symbols to decode the message. The receiver's
reaction to the message is called feedback. With feedback,
the receiver's and sender's roles are basically reversed.
The process is continuous and also continually distorted by
factors called "noise." Noise can be any type of distraction,
from interruptions and background sounds to redundancy of
messages and uncommon or unknown symbols.

Communication is the process used by one person to influ-
ence another. That is its goal and reason for initiation.
To be successful at influencing others, a communicator should
consider the quality of the communication process. Four

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specific qualities were discussed. Credibility is the most
essential element, and a sender may often overestimate his or
her own credibility. Openness occurs when a commander is acces-
sible to unit members and those members feel they are able to
bring up bad or good news. In order for the third quality,
perception, to work in a positive manner, the commander must
limit the possibility of the communication program's putting
out any conflicting or unintentional messages that could create
discontent and doubt. Personalness, the last quality discussed,
exists when the communication process takes on the feeling of
a face-to-face discussion and emphasizes a commander's personal
interest in keeping everyone informed. The next chapter will
move from the theoretical and general comments about communi-
cation to a discussion of the internal communication channels
and programs provided for by Air Force regulations.

NO PRINT

Chapter Three

## ESTABLISHED AIR FORCE
## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Today's Internal Information Program is based on a program started in the Air Force in 1954. The goals and purpose of the program are still the same, as stated by the Chief of Staff, General Gabriel,

> The program promotes widespread understanding
> and awareness of Air Force operations, mis-
> sions, goals, doctrine, history, heritage,
> and the values we defend. It tells our people
> what they can expect from the Air Force and
> what the Air Force expects from them. And it
> serves all Air Force people--active and
> reserve, uniformed and civilian, individuals,
> families and retirees.

One of General Gabriel's key points summarizes the backbone of any organization's internal communication program. It must tell the employees "what they can expect from the organization" and "what they will be expected to give in return." To do this, a communication program will need two-way channels, lines of communication running down from the commander to individual members of a unit and lines running up to the commander from the lowest echelons. Also, the up channel must be able to be initiated at any time, not just in reaction to a message received from above. The Air Force Internal Information Program has established both up and down channels

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and different vehicles of communication. In every case, these channels can benefit the commander. This is especially true when a subordinate takes the time and effort to initiate the contact. The feedback loop is as valuable as the channel used to transmit the original message.

This chapter will investigate the various formal internal communication channels provided for by Air Force regulations. The emphasis will be on philosophy, style and content, rather than detailed mechanics. When appropriate, the Air Force channel will be discussed in light of civilian corporate variations and possible improvements.

## BASE NEWSPAPER

The base newspaper is undoubtedly the most visible product of a commander's internal communication program. It can be seen in offices, base homes and dormitories, and community areas, such as the commissary and base exchange. This high visibility means it can become a major communication channel. It can deliver a uniform, concise and specific message to a widely scattered, diverse audience. With a distinctive logo and appearance, a base newspaper can become a source of pride and identity for a base and its commander. Public affairs guidance urges commanders to "make sure the highest quality people are assigned to the base newspaper" and exempts these people from "other duties that interfere with base newspaper production." Visibility means importance; the newspaper can

be the keystone of the internal communication program. But, this prominence can be a danger, too. The impact of the newspaper can be exaggerated. A commander who concentrates almost solely on the newspaper may ignore other valuable communication channels, such as Commander's Call and others to be discussed later. Balancing communication products and using different channels to repeat messages can be more effective than just producing a slick, three-color issue each week. This is not to say appearances are not important. An attractive publication reflects pride in the wing and its mission. It communicates a professional attitude to its readers. However, the commander and newspaper staff should be careful not to let artistic photography and printing quality override the message. As D'Aprix summarized, "If you just want to produce a pretty publication with good writing and competent photography, that's legitimate. But understand the long-term consequences. It's only a tool that's part of a process. It's a means, not an end."

What should be the overall mission of the base newspaper? Is there an underlying theme tying together base sports, personnel awards, and current news stories, editorials, and an Action Line column? An editorial in the <u>Bell Telephone Magazine</u> described that publication's mission in terms very appropriate to a base newspaper, "<u>Bell Telephone Magazine</u> is intended to be a publication that ties together events and issues underlying the events, and shows how these

affect the business, you, and your job...We promise to pro-
vide interpretation and relevance,...." The base newspaper
can help provide meaning and importance to the many facets of
an Air Force member's professional, as well as family and
social life. Whenever possible, current Air Force news
should relate to local issues and people. For example, the
Air Force News Service (AFNS) functions like a civilian "wire"
(news) service. Each week, a package of stories about Air
Force people, places and events is sent to each public affairs
office. These weekly packages contain "hard" news stories,
feature articles, and editorials about Air Force-wide interest
items. Other "hot" (immediate interest) stories are sent by
message because timeliness is critical to the value of certain
news items. Rarely are AFNS stories required to be printed,
although some are. Instead, the base newspaper editor and
PAO choose which stories will be used in the limited space of
a weekly issue.

It is important, therefore, for the commander to make
clear the subject areas to be given primary consideration.
Important questions to ask are, "Is this story relevant to
the people of this base?" and "Does the story 'tie events
together' and add meaning to the life and mission of this
base?" If the answers are yes, then the task is to "local-
ize." AFNS stories are usually written with a command or Air
Force-wide perspective. Localizing means, for instance,
telling the airman on the flightline how an Air Force fraud,

waste and abuse campaign will affect daily maintenance procedures. If a local impact isn't quickly established in a story, most readers will lose interest and move on to another story.

Stories originating at the base can also add relevance to the overall mission. The ever-popular intramural sports program stories are good examples. They help reinforce unit morale and provide an outlet for personal achievement. Newspaper coverage that only publishes game scores and play-by-play descriptions misses the chance to expand on general Air Force sports program goals. Physical fitness is part of mission fitness. Stories about base athletes--how they get into shape and stay that way--can help educate and motivate others concerning their own fitness programs. Stories about achievers, on the job and off, could not only boost the morale of the individual, but do something for the base image and make others feel proud.

Not every story can be inspiring and uplifting. The openness and credibility of a communication program requires that an internal publication deal with problems, too. PAOs and public affairs technicians learn early they are not free-wheeling, investigative journalists. Some news-gathering procedures are similar, though. They should establish contacts, "a beat system," throughout the base to gather story ideas and information. They can also serve as extra sets of

eyes and ears for the commander--not as spies, but as pulse-takers and rumor-catchers. Consistency and credibility are important in responding to these observations. A commander may only want to deal with a problem within the confines of a Commander's Call or a base council. Depending upon the situation, however, ignoring the problem in other communication channels, such as the newspaper, may send mixed messages to base personnel. Credibility suffers. And, without credibility, the newspaper loses value to its readers. The Arco Spark is an example of a company newspaper that has considerably strengthened the internal communication program of the seventh-largest oil company in the United States, the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). Part of its impact and credibility is because, according to Robert Levering, a management analyst, "it doesn't fawn over management. Nor does it engage in rah-rah journalism. And it's not afraid to print criticism of the company or the petroleum industry." The Arco Spark could not do what it does without top-level management support. Support from the wing commander is essential for a base newspaper's success in dealing with tough issues. It is the commander's newspaper, reflecting personal command emphasis.

> ...it is essential that the editor have the
> commander's support in dealing frankly with
> local problems and controversy. Through open
> discussion of problems and controversy, the
> base newspaper no longer appears to be hiding
> the truth. As importantly, management loses
> its head-in-sand appearance. In short, people
> start to listen and to believe what management
> says is worth listening to.

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In addition to credibility and openness, the quality of personalness is reflected in a base newspaper. A rule of thumb is "Don't have the boss in every photograph." A commander has other ways to interject ideas and opinions into each issue. One major item is an Action Line column, which will be discussed in a following section. A second way is through a personal editorial column.

Just like the rest of the newspaper's items, editorials should deal with both positive stories and problem areas. A continuous dose of chastisement or "rah-rah" will eventually become predictable and ignored. Publicly praising a job well done goes a long way to reinforcing behavior, and boosting morale. When appropriate, a commander might consider citing exceptional individuals as well as units for their efforts. Writing about a problem area in personal terms of corcern, rather than using an impersonal, corporate "we," can also grab readers' attention. Guest editorials from other unit commanders and base officials can also be used. These editorials should meet the commander's standards of openness and credibility. A commander might even invite non-Air Force sources to contribute. Consider, for example, a situation where there is friction between military people and the surrounding civilian community. The mayor of the community may want to present the feelings and impressions of the local people in an effort to get both sides to appreciate the other's

viewpoint. Conflict resolution can begin by opening communication channels and lessening tensions. The mayor's guest editorial could be the first step in developing a mutual understanding. The editorial column, however, should primarily function as the commander's forum.

Like news stories, an editorial can help tie events together and add relevance. A news story can describe the basics of how a new aircraft will become part of the base's inventory. An accompanying editorial can discuss the importance of this new weapon system in the national defense plan. The base newspaper staff should always keep abreast of distinguished visitors to the base. Experts and top-level officials can contribute to the discussion of how larger issues may impact the local operation. One PAO suggested, "Don't pass up the opportunity to interview senior Air Force leaders and other dignitaries when they visit your base. These individuals can provide a wealth of information on key Air Force issues, plans and programs." These interviews should be cleared in advance of the visit, so the individual can be ready to freely respond to questions.

Editorials, local interviews and stories, and AFNS items are each important parts of an effective base newspaper. The newspaper's readers also judge its utility. The commander and PAO can monitor the newspaper's impact in several ways. One method is to periodically conduct readership surveys. The Office of Management and Budget has approved a standardized

Air Force Base Newspaper Readership Survey (OMB control number 0701-0075) valid through 30 Nov 1986. The control number allows the survey to be administered to military personnel and their dependents, retirees and Air Force civilian employees without further clearance. The questions should not be changed significantly. The survey topics include demographics of readership, newspaper credibility, appearance and interest as perceived by its readers. Quality and content are also surveyed.

A second guage of a newspaper is to compare it to criteria readers in general may use to judge any periodical. The American Society of Newspaper Editors prepared a list which included these items: (Author's comments are in the parentheses.)

1.  Complete but concise.

2.  Credible.

3.  Relevant.

4.  Easy to read and understand. No jargon or technical language. (Watch out for acronyms or descriptions and phrases used only by pilots, or logisticians, or personnel specialists. Also, avoid writing as if for a regulation.)

5.  Recognizes the importance of local news. People want to be proud of their local paper and feel it helps create a good image.

6.  Well packaged. Easy to find what you want. Easy to handle.

7.  Leaves the reader better informed, more involved with the community, a better citizen. (As with other references to "community," substitute "base," "command," or "mission.")

8.  Fair--the pros and cons of the debate.

9.  Encourages the reader to participate through speak-up columns, letters, guest columns.

10. Makes hard news appealing, interesting, something that encourages readers to read more than the headline and first paragraph.

11. Knows your community...well...Lets your community know you. Visible and in touch.

12. ...reflecting the needs and interests of all constituents....(The base newspaper must communicate to dependents, retirees, Air Force civilians, officers and airmen, first-termers and twenty-year veterans.)

13. Not only covers the community, city, state, and region--but is local in language, look tone. (Among other things, localize the AFNS.)

14. Unafraid to repeat background information and definitions that readers need to benefit fully from a story.

15. Keeps the bad news in perspective. Hunts out the reassuring news. (A base newspaper shouldn't ignore bad news or sidestep tough issues.)

16. Adds appeal with color, graphics, pictures.

17. ...A paper available where people live, work, shop, travel, eat.

18. In contact with readers formally or informally. (Readership surveys and a good beat system.)

## ACTION LINES

An Action Line is the commander's most visible feedback loop in the most prominent communication channel, the base newspaper. It is important for what it tells a commander about the "people climate" on the base and for how a commander reacts to the questions and observations received. As commander of the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing, Brig. Gen. John T. Chain regarded Action Lines as "essential to understanding what's on people's minds, and learning the problems of a base." Action Line columns are probably the most widely read part of a base newspaper. The challenge for the commander is to make it appreciated and effective.

Action Line inputs can come through the mail, but most systems rely on a 24-hour telephone recorder. The calls are transcribed and then distributed to the appropriate office for a response. It is a good idea to keep a record of the complaints/suggestions/questions and establish a suspense system to track them. One answer may draw additional questions, so a record will help follow-on research. Timeliness is important in responding to a query. The suspense system should work to provide answers in as short a time as possible.

Timeliness contributes to the eventual credibility of an answer. Credibility is the most critical quality of an Action Line. The communication qualities--openness, personalness, and perception--also impact the column's effectiveness. Openness, for example, can be seen in the way the

column "deals with hard and sometimes controversial issues."
People will be encouraged to use the column if there is a
willingness to handle potentially embarrassing questions.
Previously unknown problem areas can surface. One complaint
can help the commander foretell potential larger problems.

Personalness can be seen in just how strongly the com-
mander supports the Action Line and how much personal atten-
tion is devoted to the answers. Questions and complaints are
distributed to staff agencies for answers. When a caller is
identified, a response should go directly to the individual,
usually from a person responsible for the area in question.
The answer should also be printed in the next scheduled issue
of the newspaper. Most queries are anonymous. The commander
must act as the individual's representative by ensuring a
straightforward answer is provided. "There is a natural
reluctance on the part of subordinate agencies to admit fault
or wrongdoing, especially when the reply is being reviewed by
the installation commander."

The commander's personal involvement must deal with this
reluctance. People may complain to identify a problem or
just to "sound-off." The goal of the answer should be to fix
the problem and not necessarily reprimand someone. One sug-
gestion is "to have a disinterested agency investigate the
more significant allegations to obtain the facts and insure
the commander's credibility." This need not be done every

time. Occasional follow-up queries on important issues indicate a commander's personal interest in making this feedback system work. Command interest can also be shown by attaching a cover letter, signed by the commander, to all complaint investigation correspondence (See Appendix).

Question-and-answer programs are an integral part of corporate communication programs, too. Civilian corporations also recognize the importance of top-level management participation. Elmer Andersen, the chairman of H.B. Fuller Company, one of the major makers of glues, adhesives, and sealants, personally answers "The President's Hot-Line" one day each year. The 40 to 50 calls may deal with personnel problems, suggest ways to improve a product, or just chat about how things are going with the company. Other company presidents maintain regular, every day "hot lines" directly into their offices. Answering a direct Action Line may not be feasible in a commander's daily schedule. These ideas may be modified, however. A period of time could be designated each week or month when the commander's telephone number becomes the Action Line number and the commander answers personally.

Personalness can help with perceptions. Readers' perceptions of the commander's concern and involvement are important. Someone may never use the Action Line, but knowing it's a credible avenue if needed strengthens the general faith in the internal communication program. Some people perceive

the Action Line as a forum only for petty complaints. A
commander "should not be dragged into appearing overly con-
cerned with petty annoyances," but must also guage carefully
the reaction readers might nave to a complaint and its answer.
As Lt. Gen. John P. Flynn (USAF, Ret.), a former Air Force
Inspector General, summarized, "We recognize that complaints
are the things that cause a man or woman to be less effective
on the job or dissatisfied with his or her environment,
especially when a lack of communication or understanding is
involved. Whether the problem is real or perceived, it is a
deterrent to efficiency and morale."

The Action Line does not replace the chain-of-command,
and the perception that it does should be discouraged. A com-
mander should not ignore a question but may end an answer by
strongly suggesting, if appropriate, the inquiry should have
been first addressed through the individual's supervisor. One
study of Action Lines, however, found most issues represented
"frustrations aimed at a particular situation or lack of ser-
vice from outside the complainant's immediate organization.
In such cases, the individual's immediate supervisor cannot
be very effective in resolving the issue." These issues are
generally "quality of life" concerns. In some cases involving
retirees or dependents, the Action Line is perceived as the
only chain-of-command or communication available to deal with
the problem.

All these factors come together in establishing the most
valuable characteristic of the Action Line--credibility. Com-
plaints and questions can't be ignored or talked around.
Answers need to "explain the reasons for policies and prac-
tices (rather than simply saying that Air Force regulations
tell us to do it that way)." The column is a two-way channel,
not just a one-way feedback channel. Someone may complain
about a situation and the commander can say, "I'm glad you
noticed this problem. It's been bothering me, too. Here's
how I think WE can work together to solve it." "For the com-
mander, who normally is placed in a defensive position, it's
an opportunity to show concern, give credit, inform, take
action and/or elaborate on policy. It is also an excellent
opportunity for the commander to address important issues
that might not otherwise be raised."

## COMMANDER'S CALL

Commander's Call is a valuable part of an internal com-
munication program for one major reason--face-to-face commun-
ication. Face-to-face communication provides immediate feed-
back and eliminates many interference (noise) factors. Even
when addressing a large group, a speaker who is aware of the
sights and sounds of an audience gets immediate feedback.
One quip is that a speaker shouldn't be concerned if people
in the audience look occasionally at their watches. Only
when those people start shaking their watches to see if they

are still ticking should the speaker worry. People react
with anger, disgust, pleasure, or pride whether in an audience
or in one-on-one situations. It s just easier to see it in
the one-on-one setting. If there is a murmur of discontent
at an announcement, however, the commander can stop and ask
for reactions or questions. To use a popular phrase, the
commander may have to "fight for feedback."

Commander's Call must be conducted at least once a
quarter, but can be held oftener. Previously, these meetings
were required monthly. If the schedule permits, monthly
meetings increase the chances for dialog. However, more
meetings will not be productive if the commander does not
prepare a stimulating program and bring along a bag full of
enthusiasm and concern for others. An interesting program,
vigorously conducted need not ignore problem areas or serious
subjects. If problems are addressed enthusiastically, rather
than in a business-meeting monotone, people will sit up and
take notice. One major medical equipment firm, Physio-Control
Corporation, conducts quarterly company meetings that deal
with business matters--sales, new products, and goal's--but
still interject a "fair amount of hoopla." (A marching band
was once used as an eye-opener.) The meetings are stimulating
and motivating.

Air Force military personnel are required to attend
Commander's Call. The meetings should be held during normal
duty hours, a practice also followed by civilian corporations.

Once a quarter, the Remington Company, maker of electric shavers, shuts down its factory--"at a cost of $10,000" each time--so the company president can present a report to the employees and answer their questions. Remington's CEO, Victor Kiam, "believes that nothing is more important in building a business than regular communication with workers and giving them a sense of participation."

There are different ways of fostering this sense of participation. Keeping people informed of unit "activities, achievements and goals" is fundamental. Civilian corporations call such sessions "company reports" or "jobholders meetings." At the Pitney-Bowes Company these meetings involve not only the chief executive officer, but also key management representatives, such as the treasurer, controller, and employee relations vice president. Together, they present a picture of the company's finances, wages and benefits, and current and future operation. A question-and-answer session always follows and can last for hours. Participation comes when there is an open, nonthreatening atmosphere, and a reasonable anticipation of receiving an acceptable answer to a question. Norman Sigband, a professor of business communication at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, observed,

> Top management should remember that it takes
> only one meeting in which an employee's legit-
> imate item is pushed aside ("Oh, that's beyond

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our control"); or manipulated ("Well, the government just wouldn't let us do that"); or handled in a cavalier fashion ("That's almost too minor for us to work on"), and all future sessions will become almost valueless.

The questioner may not agree with the decision. But, if the commander tackles the topic with openness, other questions will surface. The dialog will continue.

Soliciting ideas for possible solutions can also help commit people to their unit's goals. Follow-up is important in handling both questions and suggestions received at these meetings. If a question cannot be adequately answered at the time, the commander must make sure a follow-up clarification or elaboration is quickly passed back to the individual. Someone else in the meeting should take notes for the commander to make sure the question isn't forgotten after the meeting. Suggestions that don't work should still be acknowledged: "We tried your idea. It didn't work because...But, thanks again for your thoughts and keep thinking about better ways to do our jobs." Those ideas that work should be publicly recognized in the next meeting and through other communication channels.

Air Force civilian employees are not required to attend Commander's Call unless the program is job related and approved under the union contract. They are part of the team and should be encouraged to attend. Their commitment is valuable, too, and should be addressed just as the military person's commitment is.

In some cases, a commander may open the program to the spouses. Their support has proven critical toward retention and on-the-job effectiveness. Bringing them into the communication channel can build up their basic interest, understanding and support. One commander regularly divided his Commander's Call into a business/formal part and a social/informal half. Families would attend, cookies and cakes were passed around and the good part of the job--presenting awards and giving recognition--would be held. No accomplishment or achievement is too small or insignificant if recognized in an enthusiastic way, especially in front of a person's family. Awards other than just military honors should be considered. People can be recognized, for example, for completing a college degree program. Many hours of hard work go into such accomplishments, even if they are achieved during off-duty time. Personal initiative should always be recognized in front of others and with enthusiasm.

Creating a stimulating program is easier because of the freedom a commander has to choose topics and presentation methods. Guest speakers can furnish interesting and expert points of view. In conjunction with Project Warrior activities at one base, "old warriors" from the local civilian communities are invited to speak about their military experiences and views toward the profession. This could expand to speakers from base tenant units talking about their missions and operations. Quality of life issues can also be

highligh... A credit union representative could present

ideas on f... cial planning and budgeting, for instance.

Major comma... ...efing teams, chamber of commerce or better

business bure... ...resentatives, or the local Base Exchange

manager could con... ... ... informative talks. Time should be

set aside for questi... ... ... speakers, too.

Another communicati... ... ... Commander's Call is the

film clip or videotape program. Th... would be in addition

to the mandatory Air Force Now film. The audiovisual channel

is used more than ever today by civilian corporations, but

they often produce their own programs or contract out to a

production company. An Air Force base usually doesn't have

such resources available on a regular basis. Clips and pro-

grams can be obtained, however, through the base audiovisual

library to supplement a topic, such as a Project Warrior

presentation.

## SUPERVISORS

Next to talking directly with senior management, most

employees say they "prefer to get their information from their

supervisors." This may reflect a general impression found in

surveys that "most employees seem to like their immediate work

environment and the people with whom they work closest--their

work groups and immediate supervisors." The Connecticut Bank

and Trust Company uses supervisors as communicators for a very

practical reason. As an assistant vice president of the bank

said, "We recognized that the supervisors had to be the communicators at the bank. Everyone reported to a supervisor and that was the best way to communicate." An internal communication program should capitalize on this high regard and trust most employees seem to place in their immediate bosses.

Supervisors should be brought into the communication program or chain as early and fully as possible. To begin, key supervisors should be identified within each organization. They could be shop foremen, division chiefs, or other work group leaders as determined by each unit. These people can become part of the base communication "network." Next, the wing commander or individual squadron commanders could bring these people together to discuss the important role they can play in the communication process. They should understand, if they don't already realize, their impact as a primary information source. Once they know why they are key communicators, then they can appreciate how they fit into the base communication system.

These supervisors will become the direct targets for information releases, news bulletins (See News Bulletins, Chapter 4), or memos from the commander. If possible, they would be called together for briefings about events or future programs that will influence the base population and/or its operation and mission. At these meetings, the supervisors could ask the same kinds of questions their subordinates would ask if given the chance. Armed with this information and

possibly a news bulletin or written background paper, the supervisors would then go back to their work areas to brief their subordinates. The supervisors could answer questions on the spot. If a question was raised which couldn't be answered, the supervisor could go directly to the source or action officer (the public affairs office, for example) for more information.

This system has several advantages. It uses what has already been established as the most preferred source of information for employees. Supervisors meeting with the commander can ask questions and provide immediate feedback about the subject. Face-to-face communication will also occur when the supervisors meet with their subordiates to pass along the information. The system doesn't require a mass meeting of all base people, such as with a Commander's Call. This adds efficiency and still provides effective face-to-face communication. If a meeting with supervisors can't be arranged, they can still be provided a news bulletin more efficiently than trying to print one for each unit member. Finally, the supervisors will be able to gather feedback from their small work areas and pass it back up the chain to the commander.

This supervisors' network can be used regularly as well as for subjects of immediate concern. This practice could further establish supervisors as reliable and major sources of information. The commander could for example, hold separate Commander's Calls for supervisors (officers and senior

noncommissioned officers). Their views concerning problems, policies and procedures could be solicited. They could represent both themselves and their subordinates. If supervisors discover they can contribute to the success of the internal communication program, they may take the initiative to improve it further. They could intercept rumors and provide correct information to kill those rumors, for example. As part of the internal communication program, their credibility becomes tied directly to the commander's. With support, they can be key players and the commander's best representatives.

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The ultimate responsibility for conducting an internal communication program rests with the commander. The role of the public affairs officer is to "counsel management on the total communication process." The PAO is the specialist who should advise the commander about the communication methods, techniques, and channels available. The PAO should have a mixture of journalism and public relations abilities. Planning and implementing an effective internal communication program takes both talents.

As a member of the commander's direct staff, the PAO should act both as a communication counselor and an action officer and coordinator for the commander's overall communication program. Certain requirements will need to be fulfilled before the PAO can successfully act. First, the PAO

will need direct and quick access to the commander. Reacting
to either an on-base crisis or an off-base event will require
the ability to discuss options available to get the straight
story out to the base population. Second, the PAO should be
involved early in operational planning. For example, for a
unit preparing for deployment, satisfying the information
needs of people is an important requirement along with logis-
tics. To assess the information needs of a base, the PAO
will need to know what is happening and what is planned for
the future. If kept in the planning cycle, the PAO can be
"proactive--not merely reactive--by anticipating change and
interpreting this (change) to...employees." Also, the PAO
should work to be a trusted member of the wing team. Just
because the PAO deals regularly with civilian news media is
no reason to cut off the flow of information to this officer.
Countless examples, both large and small, have shown ignoring
peoples' information needs results in operational and per-
sonnel problems later. Just as in medicine, an ounce of
prevention (communication) is worth a pound of cure (explan-
ation).

PAO advice and counsel should not be limited to the wing
commander. The PAO should be available and, indeed, actively
offer expertise and suggestions for improving squadron and
smaller unit internal communication programs. The PAO should,
for instance, publish a monthly "newsletter" with suggested

topics and ideas for Commander's Call. Then, occasional visits to the meetings could provide feedback about how the program is presented.

The PAO can also ensure messages and announcements issued to civilian news media and the local civilian community agree with internal communication messages. Keeping the internal public informed as quickly and completely as possible while responding to news media and local community requests is an important coordination task. For an internal communication program to be successful, the base population needs to feel they are the first audience the commander considers.

## BULLETIN BOARDS

Bulletin boards seem to be everywhere. They are filled to their borders with "must-post" items on safety, voting and the suggestion program. The daily administrative bulletin and other miscellaneous notices are also arranged neatly. Do these hallway and orderly room billboards have a legitimate function in a commander's internal communication program? They do, but to a limited extent.

Bulletin boards have limited impact because they are always in the same spot and usually look the same, no matter what is posted. They become part of the background. At best, most people only occasionally stop for quick perusals. How can bulletin boards become a regular news stop? To start,

the regularly updated material should be segregated from the current ("hot") items. These current news items can be copies of a news bulletin (See Chapter 4). Bulletins or announcements should be prominently displayed, but they should not be posted longer than their immediate news value. People should be informed that, if something is posted in a certain section on the board, it is, at that time, immediately important to them. The idea is to catch the message in the bulletin board rather than it becoming a part of the daily background blur.

Even though items of immediate interest should be posted prominently, bulletin boards should not become a primary way of informing people about major policy changes or events. These announcements are made best through meetings with super- visors, commanders or the entire unit where face-to-face com- munication (including feedback and clarification) can occur. Announcements posted on bulletin boards can supplement the major communication channels. The small number, hopefully, of people who miss the announcement through major channels may pick it up through a secondary channel, such as the bulletin board. Bulletin boards are valuable because of their redun- dancy (backing up other channels) and their repetition (re- peating a message delivered previously through other channels).

## BASE COUNCILS

Various councils exist on an Air Force base to deal with potential, developing or current problems affecting the lives and

work of people. Councils have representatives of various
units or groups of people meeting regularly with the commander
or a command representative. These councils are also used in
civilian corporations. Their purposes are basically similar.
They act as a forum for discussing problems or suggesting pro-
grams to improve the working and living environment.

No matter what the membership or charter of a council,
it is a two-way communication channel that should not be over-
looked in the total base communication program. The qualities
of credibility, openness, perception and personalness are all
present. Questions and complaints need to be addressed construc-
tively and directly. At the same time, the commander can use
these meetings to present views and information which should
be passed to the units through their council representatives.
Information presented in these meetings should agree with
other communication channels, both on and off base. Follow-up
of issues is also very important. The council representatives
will take back with them not only the information presented,
but the tone and quality in which it was presented.

## NEWCOMER'S ORIENTATION

First impressions are important. The Individualized
Newcomer Treatment and Orientation (INTRO) program is designed
to make a newcomer's transition into a new unit and area as
painless and smooth as possible. Staff agencies and base
organizations talk about their functions and services at these

meetings held periodically for new arrivals. This may also be the first occasion for the newcomers to meet the commander.

The commander undoubtedly will want to present certain standards and discuss important local issues. Whatever the topics, the commander should also be aware that this is the first time to be seen in the role as the base's chief communicator. It would be appropriate, for example, to describe the basic philosophy of the base newspaper's Action Line or encourage active feedback through supervisors and forums such as Commander's Call. The commander could briefly describe the various communication channels available on the base. From the start, new people should be aware of the internal communication system created to help them do their job more effectively and establish a high quality of life.

## Chapter Four

## SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW
## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Establishing and developing an internal communication
program is critically important for a civilian corporation.
Successful companies probably have effective communication
programs. United Airlines and its chairman, Edward Carlson,
illustrate this theory according to Gerald Goldhaber, vice
president of the International Communication Association.
Before Carlson took over the company, United lost $41 million
in 1970. Carlson evaluated United's communication program as
inadequate, "...people were poorly informed; they didn't under-
stand why certain policies were necessary." The new president
started traveling around the company circuit (200,000 miles
a year) to talk with employees in formal and informal meetings.
Called "visible management," this program was a key, manage-
ment believes, to United's comeback. In 1975, the airline had
$86.3 million in profits. According to Carlson, "We work
pretty hard at communications--all of us. In my visits I con-
stantly encourage employees to raise problems and suggestions.
In turn, we are careful to respond to their ideas, because we
really do care about what our employees are thinking."

Unfortunately, not all corporations are successful in developing their internal communication programs. The Opinion Research Corporation summarized the general state of corporate communications as viewed by about 250,000 employees. "Most employees, even at the managerial level, feel that internal communication in today's organizations is deteriorating. Employees believe that they are not kept well informed, that management is not willing to listen to them, and that they have to rely on the grapevine for information." There are two important questions an organization needs to ask in developing a communication program: What kinds of information do employees want and need? What sources do employees use to get this information? The International Association of Business Communicators sponsored a survey in 1981 of 45,000 United States and Canadian workers. The survey found the following information concerning what kinds of information employees seek:

(1) Future plans of the organization--95 %.

(2) Personnel policies and practices--90.3 %.

(3) Productivity improvement--89.7 %.

(4) Job-related information--89.4 %.

The most used and preferred source for this information was not an established publication or formal meeting. It was the supervisor. "Unfortunately, many more employees (90.3 %) would like to be getting more information from their managers than actually are at present (55.1 %)." The grapevine was the second most used source (39.8 %) but the least preferred

out of 15 different communication channels discussed. The grapevine grows where there is a temporary information void. People turn to it when no other information sources are available.

Other highly-favored sources indicate employees' strong preference for face-to-face communication with decision makers. For example, "small group meetings" and "top executives" were listed second and third respectively behind "immediate supervisors" as preferred sources. Employee handbooks, orientation meetings and regular publications followed these top three. The emphasis clearly is on one-on-one and small group communication, with the chief executive and staff involved. Publications and larger meetings and orientations supported these personal sources.

The previous chapter discussed the current Air Force internal communication channels. They provide for the important characteristics of personalness and face-to-face communication. The base newspaper can supply the background information to support the messages given by the commander through Commander's Call, the INTRO program, and base council meetings.

This chapter will expand on these channels. It will suggest other ways a commander can meet people and keep them informed. Most of these ideas are based on civilian corporate experience. They have proven their worth. But, not every idea will suit the base, the situation or the commander. They are presented for consideration to fit specific needs.

# NEWS BULLETINS

A television advertisement for the Wall Street Journal,
the premier daily financial newspaper, disparages competition
from weekly business magazines with the comment that the maga-
zines' news often comes too late to be useful to the reader.
This is a problem all weekly or monthly publications face.
The weekly base newspaper is no exception. If an important
event happens on Friday, it will have to wait a week for base
newspaper coverage.

A week may be too long to wait, however. An event or a
story published in civilian news media could spark speculation
among the military and civilian workers. Without an official
version of the story, the gap will quickly be filled by the
"grapevine." To fight the grapevine, a base internal commun-
ication program can fill in the time between regular publica-
tions with other information sources. Just as the Air Force
News Service uses the message system to send out "hot" news
stories worldwide, a base can also establish its own system
of news bulletins. The procedure and ground rules can be
simple.

(1) The news item should impact a significant part of the
base population. The item could address mainly spouse-dependent
and civilian employee groups, too.

(2) The value of the news item would diminish considerably
if held back until the next regular issue of the base newspaper.
The story may be, or have already been, mentioned in other news

media. Without an immediate "straight facts" story, damaging rumors and speculation will fill the news vacuum. People may need to react, to do something, in response to the news item.

(3) The item must be approved by the commander for this priority release program. Overuse of these bulletins can reduce the idea's importance and impact. The items will no longer be handled with the speed needed.

(4) The format and name of the news bulletin (Speed-o-Gram, Commander's News Flash, etc.) should be distinctive, enabling it to stand out among routine messages and paperwork. Even a certain colored paper could be used.

(5) The Public Affairs Office would prepare the release and take care of any research and coordination prior to release. The base printing office would give priority attention to the bulletin. Distribution can be handled through the base distribution system or hand carried through any other system devised for expeditious delivery.

(6) Key people in the base internal communication network should receive copies. These people can include subordinate unit commanders and first sergeants, heads of staff agencies, and key supervisors. Orderly rooms and administrative offices would ensure copies were posted on bulletin boards. Other copies can be posted on public bulletin boards, such as in the commissary, base exchange, clubs, post offices, dining halls, and credit unions. Work area supervisors and union stewards could use copies to brief people on the job.

(7) The release would not be longer than one typed page. This would facilitate printing, distribution and posting. Only information essential for the reader's immediate understanding and action would be required.  Details could be provided later in the base newspaper, through Commander's Call, or by other communication channels.

## TELEPHONE NEWSLINES/RUMOR HOTLINES

Along with a news bulletin, a telephone newsline is a channel that can provide quick news.  It uses a telephone automatic recording and answering machine.  A news message can be recorded for playback.  The message can be changed, as needed, to keep it current.  Stories, written in the form of short radio news bulletins, can deal with a quick-breaking situation affecting a large portion of the base population.  This service would fill in the information gaps between regular communication media, such as the base newspaper.  After normal duty hours, it could be available to anyone who has heard a rumor and wants to know the official story.

This channel can also help control rumors by turning into a live newsline and rumor control line.  The line could run directly into the Public Affairs Office.  During normal duty hours, or during off duty hours in an emergency situation, public affairs staff members could answer the calls personally. They would be able to provide the text of an official news release or the details of a story.  Also, and this could be

an important extra benefit, these staff members could respond to questions. They could take down the rumors people hear across the base. These questions or concerns could then be addressed in future base newspaper stories, commander's meetings, or telephone newsline recorded answers. Many people automatically pick up the telephone to call someone when they want to find out if a story is true. This system would let them satisfy their urge to find out the facts quickly, while enabling them to get the straight story. A telephone newsline need not wait for an important, fast-breaking news item. Daily base news, future events, and tidbits of information can contribute to the overall goal of satisfying peoples' information needs.

## COFFEE BREAKS AND LUNCHES

A formal Commander's Call or employee quarterly meeting can shut down a unit's operation or limit productivity for an afternoon. It is efficient for communication because it deals with a large number of people at once, while still providing the chance for face-to-face communication and feedback. Some civilian corporations have altered the concept by reducing the number of people involved in a meeting but increasing the number of meetings.

One of the largest newspaper chains in the United States, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Inc., has developed meetings between employees and senior managers called "management coffee breaks."

Groups of 20 to 25 workers get together with company leaders

for an hour and a half "coffee break" to discuss anything

about the operation except personalities of specific individ-

uals. Questions can be submitted in advance and, says presi-

dent Alvah Chapman, "Some are real zingers."

At Remington, they serve coffee, too, and call their

weekly Friday morning meetings "Coffee Klatches." Each

meeting brings in about 10 people to meet with management and

every employee can attend at least one meeting a year. "They

are told the latest news about the company, complaints are

aired, ideas are heard." Other large corporations break

meetings down into departmental size. Small groups of Delta

Airline employees meet on a regular basis with the "senior

management of their department." A Colorado medical products

company, Cobe Laboratories, Inc., serves more than coffee to

weekly gatherings. Buffet lunches, hosted by senior manage-

ment, are held for groups of 50 employees. The company leaders

talk about current company issues and prospects and "learn

first-hand about common gripes."

A special quality of these small meetings is that there

is true face-to-face communication. Employees who come back

from a meeting will undoubtedly spread the latest news to

their fellow workers. The individual attention of senior man-

agement strengthens the employees' personal ties to the

company. Employees feel "the company does listen to them."
They become an important part of the company's communication
process and its ultimate success.

## OUR CREDO

A wing commander may not be able to personally meet every
new unit member soon after that person arrives on the base.
How can the commander communicate the mission goals and phi-
losophy of the wing to each newcomer? This can be done at an
INTRO program. But, that is only one meeting packed with many
other speakers and topics. If professionalism and certain
standards of conduct are important to a commander, then it
might help to re-emphasize these ideas. One such way is to
develop a credo, a set of principles.

These principles can be set down in a booklet using simple
and direct terms that apply to everyone. Johnson & Johnson,
the largest health-care company in the United States, does this
in a document entitled "Our Credo." The company's principles
and operating standards are part of every employee's training.
A copy of the credo is given to all new company recruits. Moog
Inc. (electrohydraulic control products) details its company
philosophy in the beginning of the company's employee handbook.

Effective credos are basic and concise. Whether in a
booklet or on a single sheet of paper, they shouldn't just be
passed out without comment. At an INTRO briefing, or prefer-
ably at the initial conference with the unit commander, new

members should have a chance to look over the credo and ask questions. A few words from the commander, with the credo in hand, can reinforce the message. Then, the individual can attach more meaning and significance to the words. A foundation of understanding can be laid upon which further communication can build.

## SPOUSE'S ORIENTATION

In an article "Is There Life After 5?", industrial relations expert J.H. Foegen, discussed the challenge facing families in resolving home/work conflicting priorities. There is no simple solution, but "improving all the communication channels can at least alleviate the major problems." The company talking directly to the spouse of the employee is one such channel.

This is nothing new for the Air Force, but the channel may be greatly underused. Most programs revolve around some type of wive's club and its social activities. The growing concept of the "Air Force Family" is slowly changing this preoccupation. Squadron open houses and tours help spouses see the workplace and get a feel for the job. Spouses are also invited occasionally to a Commander's Call.

More can be done to communicate information and a "feeling" about the unit's mission, goals and daily challenges. A periodic commander's newsletter, directed specifically at spouses, can furnish regular doses of news about unit

activities. For example, the wing will take part in a combat exercise. Flightline mechanics and hundreds of other people will work long shifts, under considerable pressure. The commander's newsletter could talk about these upcoming challenges and what will be expected of everyone. Also, the explanation can deal with why such exercises are important to the wing and the Air Force.

The best kind of communication, face-to-face, is important with spouses, too. Previous sections of this handbook have suggested including spouses in Commander's Calls. Why not a separate quarterly or biannual Commander's Call for Spouses? The meeting could follow the same format as a regular Commander's Call. The unit's activities and problems could be discussed. Awards and recognition could be given for special support efforts on behalf of the unit, wing or base. An Air Force Now film could be shown. And, of course, plenty of time should be set aside for questions and answers.

Other get-togethers could follow the format of the management coffee breaks or lunches also discussed in this chapter. These would involve smaller groups of spouses in discussions about unit operations and goals with senior leaders. Whether the event is a Commander's Call for Spouses or a Spouse's Coffee Break with the Boss, invitations should come directly from the commander (probably through the mail or hand carried by the military member).

The purpose of these programs is to bring the spouses into the communication loop. Supervisors and commanders can explain specific projects and operations and describe exactly the important role each military member fills. One goal of this effort is to support husband and wife discussions about home work priorities. As Foegen stated, "If one spouse doesn't know why the job is such an all-consuming interest, understanding is unlikely."

## WALK-AROUND COMMUNICATION

Walk-around communication occurs when the commander gets out of the office and visits the work areas and dormitories. In a sense, it is a proactive, rather than reactive, version of an open door policy. This is the kind of communication used by chief executives such as United Airlines's Edward Carlson in his "visible management." The agenda is simple--just spend an afternoon walking through the shops in maintenance or an evening visiting an airman's dormitory.

But, a commander's time is scarce and valuable. Why would this program be worthwhile? First, it brings the commander into face-to-face communication with many different people. The environment is non-threatening since it is the airman's dormitory (home) or the civilian employee's work place instead of the commander's office or an auditorium used for Commander's Call. The topics raised can be what concerns the individuals, not what's on a meeting agenda. Feedback is

direct and quick. There should be time for questions and discussion. Above all, such visits indicate the commander's strong personal interest in keeping people informed.

## EXIT/PCS INTERVIEWS

A successful communicator fights for feedback. A commander should be as concerned with finding out if the message is getting through as with finding new channels to deliver the information. Action Lines and Commander's Call are two major feedback channels. They may not reflect the complete picture, however. Not everyone is motivated enough or feels comfortable in using the Action Line or standing up in Commander's Call to ask a question. Other feedback channels that bring people into the feedback process may be considered.

One method could be an exit or permanent change of station (PCS) interview. The Air Force Academy, for example, asks each cadet who decides to disenroll why the cadet made the decision and what factors were considered. Civilian corporations also use these interviews because "employees are more apt to speak openly." These interviews touch on many different topics of employee life, working conditions, and attitudes. One area is the management-employee communication environment.

The objective of these interviews is to discover how well the entire base internal communication program is working. They could be conducted on a random basis with personnel

departing different base organizations. There are c_. .ain

areas that might be of concern in guaging the health and per-

ceived success of an internal communication program:

(1) Opinions about the established news media sponsored

by the Air Force, such as the base newspaper, news bulletins,

and audiovisual productions.

(2) Opinions about the commander's visibility and parti-

cipation in the internal programs. Thoughts on perceived

credibility, openness, and personalness.

(3) Face-to-face communication programs, including Com-

mander's Call or other special programs (coffee break meetings/

management lunches).

(4) The role and impact of immediate supervisors, peers

and grapevines. How important were these channels and were

they preferred or did they fill in an information vacuum?

(5) In the individual's opinion, what could be done to

improve the communication environment of a particular organ-

ization and/or the base in general? What were the strong,

positive points, also?

The interview could be administered by the PAO, using

open-ended questions in an interview format. The identity of

the interviewees would not be known except for some basic dem-

ographic information. The purpose is not to tie answers to

a person, but to get one more input into a general impression.

The answers may point out a faulty assumption on the part of

the leadership team concerning how people get the information

they use to do their job and live their daily lives. A suggestion may be valuable; an observation may indicate a shortcoming. The end result may be a more effective approach.

Chapter Five

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

This handbook is directed at one purpose--helping the commander create a more effective internal communication program. Although written primarily for wing/base commanders, this handbook can also be used by squadron commanders, deputy commanders, or division chiefs. Leaders at all command levels should appreciate the importance of communication and know how the process works.

Not all organizations are successful in developing and implementing an internal communication program. Different surveys have been cited which show considerable discontent with such factors as where and how employees get information and whether or not management communicates in an open, honest and effective manner. Problems are not limited to civilian organizations. Discontent with a unit or base's communication system can quietly erode unit cohesiveness and a commander's effectiveness. Even if the "system" seems to be working well, there is always another idea to add more life or reach one more person. Innovation helps keep any communication program alive.

Developing new methods of getting the message across is one of the reasons behind this handbook. The programs are presented in a way that will hopefully stimulate other ideas. The premise is that the commander can't go wrong trying variations as long as the main theme remains: communication is essential to leadership. Through its processes, the commander helps people "understand the meaning of their lives in the work place."

There are other conclusions and recommendations included in this handbook. They deal with a general approach to improving a communication system instead of specific programs.

(1) A good starting point for developing a communication program is understanding the communication process itself. How and why do people communicate or not communicate? The lack of common meanings for words can hinder the encoding and decoding processes. Noise factors can distract from the main message, and feedback is a necessary and critical guage of how the process is working.

(2) Certain qualities about the commander and the process make communication valuable to others. Undoubtedly, the most important quality is credibility. Without people believing in the commander, the message and the communication techniques used to present the message are worthless. Other qualities that increase the effectiveness of a commander are openness, perceptions of others, and personalness.

(3) The commander should always fight for feedback. Reactions of others tell the commander if the message is getting through and if the message is the same one the commander was trying to deliver. There are feedback channels available in different communication programs. Action Lines in the base newspaper, question-and-answer sessions in Commander's Call, base council meetings and informal meetings with people are examples of feedback channels. People must believe giving feedback will not result in retribution and observations/complaints will not be dismissed out of hand.

(4) The best way to communicate is face-to-face. The commander should always try to be personally involved. Print media do not provide immediate audience feedback. Not only does face-to-face communication increase the chances for the message to be understood, it adds immeasurably to the credibility, openness and personalness of the commander. Face-to-face communication can be done through Commander's Calls. Smaller meetings, such as coffee break sessions or work area visits, are even more valuable.

(5) The commander should use the entire base communication system. Instead of just running a story in the base newspaper, the commander can discuss a subject in Commander's Call or in smaller group meetings. Announcements can be posted on bulletin boards or recorded on a telephone newsline. According to Professor Don Randy of the University of Missouri School

of Journalism, "Some media are more effective than others for certain subjects, but the media themselves are secondary to the message, and face-to-face communication is the most effective." Probably the best approach to keeping people informed, concludes Professor Randy, is to use a multimedia approach "to capture the minds, eyes and ears of a diverse work force."

(6) The public affairs officer should be the commander's expert advisor on communication. Many PAOs who head wing-level offices are junior officers (captains and first lieutenants). They are relatively inexperienced in the Air Force compared to other, senior members of the commander's staff. But, they are educated and trained in the mechanics and techniques of communication. A new commander should meet early with the public affairs officer to establish in the PAO's mind what exactly the commander's mission priorities are. The PAO's task is to help the commander address those mission priorities through the base internal communication programs.

This initial planning session can help set goals and priorities. It can establish the commander's personal philosophy and methods concerning communication. What programs seem to be working? Have other ideas been tried and what was their success? For example, what kind of agenda would the commander feel comfortable with for Commander's Call. Would the commander want to establish regular meetings with supervisors or small groups of people from different base organizations? The commander should discuss what procedures are available for

quick dissemination of news or how a "bad" news item can be
handled credibly. Regular meetings with the public affairs
officer can help the commander adjust the initial communica-
tion plan in response to feedback or changing situations.
Programs are not as important as the continuous process of
communication and the public affairs officer should assist the
commander in monitoring the effectiveness of this process.
This pulse-taking can be done through informal surveys, formal
questionnaires (as approved by Air Force), and local programs,
such as exit, CS interviews.

These recommendations have one common requirement--direct
involvement of the commander. By virtue of the position, the
commander becomes the fountainhead of information for all those
who live and work on a base. What should the commander strive
for in an internal communication program? Irving Shapiro,
former chairman of the board of DuPont, summarized the goal
of internal communication,

> At a minimum, people in an organization should
> know where the organization is headed, why it
> has chosen to go that way, and what their per-
> sonal role in the mission is to be. Their
> feelings about these matters must be solicited
> and considered. They must have the opportunity
> to contribute to policy formulation, even though
> the eventual final decisions still rest with
> management. But their sense of participation
> and support is vital.

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# APPENDIX

The following letter was used by a base commander who ran the "Hot Line" program. It is just one example of the type of letter that can accompany a question sent out for an answer. The term "Public Affairs Office" has been substituted for "Information Office" to bring the letter up-to-date.


TO:

The attached Hot Line submission was received and processed by the Public Affairs Office on _____. Since the subject of the Hot Line falls within your area of responsibility, it is requested that you prepare an appropriate response for my signature and return it to the Public Affairs Office within five working days.

In preparing your response, please keep in mind that we want to be concise and truthful in our answers. If we are wrong, admit the fault and say what is being done to correct the situation. If we are not wrong, give the reasons without demeaning the individual submitting the Hot Line. However, under no circumstances should we use a regulation as the sole reason on why something is done in a certain way. Above all, make sure your response answers the question, if one is asked, and that all responses are written in a positive tone.

If you have any questions regarding this Hot Line, call the Hot Line Monitor at Ext. ____.


Wing/Base Commander Signature

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